



Vineyards and cypress tree at Cordero di Montezemolo.

Our Second Day in Piemonte

THE NEXT DAY of our trip to Piemonte began with a visit to one of Italy's best and most famous wineries—Gaja. I have known Angelo Gaja for 40 years and have drunk and owned many of his most famous wines over this period. His daughter, Gaia Gaja, is a good friend of mine, and I wanted my friends on this trip to have this rare visit and tasting. Although Angelo and Gaia were out of town, the tasting was done by Angelo's son Giovanni, who along with Gaia and her sister Rossela, are in charge of managing the company along with influence and guidance of their father.

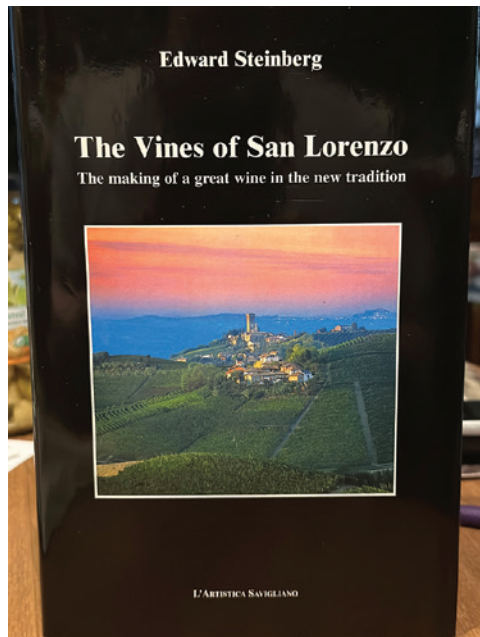
We began with the Altени di Brassica Sauvignon Blanc 2019. It was fresh and floral with notes of white flowers, jasmine, acacia, and lily, sage, mint, and tomato leaf. This provided a wake-up for the following red wines. The Gaja Barbaresco 2019 was the only Barbaresco bottled in 2019, as the best fruit from the three single cru vineyards were used for this bottling. It showed notes of rose petals and wild strawberries. It was bright and nervy with fabulous balance



The wines tasted at Gaja Winery.

and captivating aromatics.

The next wine was the Gaja Costa Russi Barbaresco 2014. Sensual, silky tannins, and sweet perfumed fruits with bright acidity and fine-grained tannins—a wow of a wine. The Gaja Conteisa Barolo 2015, garnet in color with floral notes of rose petal, violet, dandelion, juniper, and incense is big and bold with ripe tannins. Other attributes of this wine included pomegranate, sage, roasted coffee, cherry, strawberry, eucalyptus,



A copy of Jim Bryant's favorite wine book.

tobacco, and porcini.

The Gaja Sori San Lorenzo Barbaresco 1995 showed earth tones, red berries, mint, potpourri, dried herbs, tar, cigar, iron, black cherry, and truffles. Great nose. The final wine was the Gaja Sperrs Barolo 1993. Three decades have softened the sweet tannins. It is generous on the palate with ripe fruit. All these wines were excellent to outstanding and well worth the 350 Euro per person tasting fee. Each couple received a copy of one of the greatest wine books ever written—"The Vines of San Lorenzo: The Making of a Great Wine in the New Tradition" by Edward Steinberg—which chronicles the entire year life cycle of this wine from the 1989 vintage which resulted in perhaps my favorite wine ever. The book also chronicles how Angelo Gaja transformed the obscure wine Barbaresco into an international celebrity.

We next visited the Codero di Montezemolo winery in La Morra. In addition to the excellent wines produced here, it is also famous for the defining cypress tree looming high on the property.



The wines tasted at Codero di Montezemolo.

We had a tour followed by a nice lunch with accompanying current release wines (Arneis 2021, Barbara 2021, and Barolo 2018) while overlooking the vineyards. One wine of particular note is the Barolo Riserva Gorette. This wine is always excellent and is limited to 1,000 bottles per year and available only in magnums purchased at the winery after one is enjoyed at the winery.

Our last winery visit was a new one for all of us. It was the G. D. Vajra winery in the hamlet of Vergne, the highest elevation in the commune of Barolo. It was established in 1972 with an early focus on organic farming and was one of the first Piedmontese wineries to be organically certified. Highlights of the tasting were two Baroli starting with the 2018 Barolo Ravera. It has a nose of berry, leather, wild herbs, and pipe tobacco with great minerality and a dark core of plum, cherry, and spice. The Bricco delle Viole has aromas of violet, camphor, leather, and tobacco, and tasting detects cherry, crushed raspberry, and licorice. Kudos to Aldo Vajra for such fine wines in this young winery.

Our final event was dinner at my dear friend's Marchesi di Barolo winery in Barolo village. It is the birthplace of Barolo wine and is owned by Anna and Ernesto Abbona. I have been visiting and occasionally "working" at this winery since 1995 and would never visit Piemonte without stopping by to see them. Our five-course dinner at the estate took fine dining to an exceptional level along with a personal visit from Anna. All the courses were divine, especially the work-of-art pasta covered in white truffles.

We started with a Moscato Zagara, then the rare "Bric Amel," a white wine made from the

Nebbiolo grape, followed by the Barbera d'Alba Peiragal 2020, then Barbaresco Serragrilli 2018, Barolo Coste Di Rose 2016, and Barolo Sarmassa 2017. All the wines were close to perfection with the five courses. We were the sole occupants of the private quarters of one of Italy's finest families showering us with their blessings. À Votre Santé! 🍷



Marchesi di Barolo Bric Amel Langhe is made from Nebbiolo grapes.

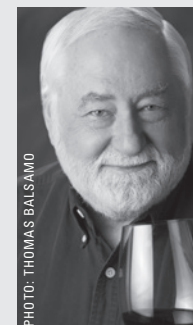


PHOTO: THOMAS BALSAMO

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